DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 131 089 TM 005 737

AUTHOR Rogers, W. Todd; D'Angelo, Gary A.
TITLE Parents, Teachers, and School Administrators as Targets for Statewide Assessment Information.
PUB DATE [Apr 76]
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (60th, San Francisco, California, April 19-23, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Personnel; *Educational Assessment; Guidelines; *Information Dissemination; *Information Utilization; Parent Participation; *State Programs; Teacher Participation; Testing Programs

ABSTRACT

The ultimate test for success of a statewide assessment program is the extent to which the assessment data and information are used by the intended assessment audiences. The major premise adopted in this paper is that involvement of parents, teachers, and school administrators in the assessment process is the key to acceptance and subsequent use of the assessment by these audiences. Three procedures are briefly outlined for encouraging involvement by these audiences in the assessment: greater local participation in determining common assessment content; include reporting variables over which these people have more or less direct control (e.g., methods and materials, district reporting); and, adopt an hourglass approach to dissemination. These suggestions are offered for consideration with the knowledge that in some states comparable procedures are being followed with some success, and with the belief that in other states, they could be achieved within the general framework of the current programs. (Author/RC)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED131089

Parents, Teachers, and School Administrators as Targets for Statewide Assessment Information[1]

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

W. Todd Rogers
University of British Columbia

Gary A. D'Angelo
University of Washington

In the first paper presented in today's symposium, Mary Hall (1976) indicated that large scale testing programs, as presently conducted, have minimal or no impact on the educational policy-making audiences for whom the testing programs are purportedly designed. Statewide assessments were included in this indictment. One explanation which has been offered to explain this situation is the apparent inadequacy of the dissemination and utilization subsystems of such programs. What can be done to promote utilization of assessment data by policymakers?

TM005 237

First, it is fair to look at why dissemination/utilization looms as a major problem. As pointed out by several people connected with statewide assessment (e.g., Bettinghaus and Miller, 1973; Womer, 1973; Impara, 1975; Shepard, 1975), the most logical starting point for a statewide assessment program is to determine its target audiences and their primary needs. In most states, though, only a short period of time has been available between the initial decision to conduct assessment and the time at which results

---

[1]Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April, 1976.

were to be reported. Understandably, energies have been focused on formulating objectives, developing exercises, printing assessment books, selecting scientific samples, developing and implementing data collection and field procedures, and on scoring and analysis. Too often these procedures have been carried out with only a vague idea of what decisions were to be made from the data and, therefore, of what and how to report. If we continue to ignore this problem, then it is likely that assessment data will be continually perceived as somewhat useless by the audiences for whom the data is intended.

In this paper, the dissemination/utilization issue as it relates to school administrators, teachers, and parents, three commonly cited audiences for statewide assessment data, is discussed. These audiences have been included in statewide assessment plans with the expectation that, by providing assessment data to them, their decisions will be more rational, overt, and deliberative and less intuitive, covert, and impulsive. We begin by briefly reviewing a few examples of the educational concerns these audiences have.

School administrators and teachers want to know what objectives have been achieved by their students and those which have not been. They are interested in information about alternative methods, materials and programs which have proved effective in other situations similar to their own. Because administrators are answerable to school boards and parents, they, together with the board and parents, are interested in whether the achievement levels reached by their students are compatible with the dollars and resources spent, and how their district and schools compare to other districts

and schools in surrounding areas, especially those which are considered similar in terms of size, pupil characteristics (e.g., race, SES, ability), and funding allocations.[2]

Impara (1975) suggested that these information needs, when considered across districts, are "simply too diverse to be met by a statewide assessment program" (p. 3). If this statement is true, it is easy to see why statewide assessment often is perceived by administrators, teachers and parents as prespecified by someone not closely related to their local situation. In short, these three potential audiences with their immediate local needs cannot directly identify themselves with statewide assessments as presently conducted.

Involvement: As Essential Ingredient for Gaining Acceptance and Use of Statewide Assessment Data

Accepting the claim that statewide assessments cannot provide a full complement of data, they nevertheless can provide useful data to school administrators, teachers, and parents. It seems evident, though,that this utility will be realized only with greater involvement in assessment by these audiences. Experience has shown that, with increased interaction, a higher level of awareness and acceptance and a stronger commitment can be gained. Thus a realistic strategy for state assessment is not to attempt to fully meet the diversity of data needed by administrators, teachers and parents, but to concentrate on the common core of learning objectives that crosses all districts and to present assessment data together with follow-up assessment services to assist interpretation and facilitate local assessment.

---

[2]The above information calls for a description of the performance of groups of students as opposed to an individual student. This latter class of decision is not considered in the present paper since statewide assessments generally are designed so as not to provide data at the individual pupil level.

The attempt in the remainder of this paper is to present some thoughts on how this might be achieved within the general framework of current state assessment programs.

1. Determination of assessment content. Determination of the subject area or domains together with the particular learning objectives to be assessed requires maximum involvement of those for whom the assessment results are intended. As claimed above, the task should be to carefully delineate common assessment content across districts. An architect who is faithful to his profession certainly cares about the "rigor" of the structure he ultimately designs. No competent architect would want to design an inferior building - but he must be concerned about the needs of his client and takes considerable time discovering what those needs are. A building which meets the most rigorous standards of structural strength but which does not meet the functional criteria of the client is relatively useless.

Several alternate procedures for gathering information necessary to delineate common assessment content and objectives have been described elsewhere (e.g., Womer, 1973; Impara, 1975, Shepard, 1975). One key feature of the approach outlined by Impara is the use of "intermediate assessment coordinators". Appointed at the County or intermediate education district level, these coordinators serve as liaisons between the state assessment staff and the professional educators (teachers, administrators) and "general public" within each school district. This technique provides personal contact, an important ingredient when establishing and maintaining involvement, and increases rather substantially

the number of people actively involved in identifying assessment content and assessment objectives.

2. Increase the number of reporting variables. Reporting variables are the variables by which students and/or schools can be classified for reporting performance or outcome data. There has been a tendency for state assessments to concentrate on demographic variables which are relatively easy to gather and to avoid those which require greater effort. This practice should be re-analyzed in the light of assessment experience gained to date. Parents, teachers and school administrators want outcome data reported by variables for which there is a set of actions they can take to bring about change. One parent remarked to me after reading a current state assessment report and noting the results by race and wealth, "but there is nothing I can do!"

Increasingly, the call is heard for "explanatory" data, data which can be used to help explain why a particular achievement level exists and why it is different from that expected. For example, present reporting variables might be increased to include process and curricular data. Not only do these variables offer some explanation, they are also the sorts of variables over which teachers, district curriculum specialists, and principals have control and can make changes where needed.

Likewise, state assessment data should be reported by district and school, administrative units over which parents, teachers, and school administrators have more or less direct control. How often have directors of state assessments been asked by local district officials for "their" results? Provided with district or school results, local personnel will

know the level of performance of their district on the common assessment content, how they compare to the state level, and how they compare with districts similar to their own. Evidence of this need is apparent in the general acceptance of the school and district level reporting used in California, from the recent decision in Washington state to assess all youngsters at a given grade, from the request from schools included in the Oregon assessment for "their" results, and from 100 percent of school districts in British Columbia requesting reports describing the performance of their district.

3. An hourglass approach to reporting. The hourglass analogy is used here to emphasize the point that dissemination in a statewide assessment program should be a continuous process with two periods of heightened activity, and not a "one-shot-at-the-end" activity as frequently is the case. Parents, teachers, and administrators need to be continuously appraised of the progress of the statewide assessment and be actively involved in planning and implementing the reporting-dissemination procedure. No matter how relevant the assessment content, no matter how well the technical aspects of the assessment are conducted, if no credible communication mechanism exists, the results will become nothing more than shelf copy covered in dust.

Heightened Activity Period One. Once the assessment content and reporting categories have been determined, plans should be developed for disseminating assessment information and results to the intended audiences. Two products should be generated during this planning period:

1. a functional reporting blueprint which reflects the needs and levels of the intended audiences, and

2. a delivery system, incorporating follow-up services and technical assistance which should be provided to aid parents, teachers, and school administrators interpret assessment data and implement their own local assessments.

The reporting blueprint provides the structure within which actual reports will be prepared. Developed almost concurrently with the determination of assessment content and identification of reporting variables, the blueprint should become an operational statement of what to report and how to report. Shepard (1975) in her paper presents a series of recommendations for reporting statewide assessment results. Among her suggestions, the following are most appropriate for preparing a reporting blueprint:

1. Different reports for different audiences
2. All reports are not written reports
3. Reports should be journalistic rather than scholarly
4. Reports should be short
5. Use data displays
6. Save technical explanations for footnotes or technical supplements
7. Overcome statistical conservatism
8. Make comparative and interpretive information a part of the report
9. Field test reports

Before finalizing the reporting blueprint and prior to the actual printing of assessment booklets, the reporting blueprints should be shared and discussed with representatives of the appropriate audiences. It is difficult to predict the consequences of a particular reporting blueprint--the exact content to be included, and the organization and vocabularly to be used in the final reports. Using data from previous assessments in the state or in other states, simulated reports can be developed and used to verify the common assessment objectives and reporting variables, to identify major flaws or omissions in presentation, and to clarify what

"will be coming" prior to the collection of actual outcome data (which corresponds to the point of no return). To achieve involvement of parents, teachers, and school administrators, this feedback should be solicited at the local level. The procedure outlined by Impara (1975) is amenable to this task.

The planning and development of the delivery system, follow-up service, and technical assistance requires the same careful attention as for reporting. In formulating this particular subtask, we are assuming that the preparation, publication and distribution of reports is not sufficient to ensure that the reports will actually get to and be used by those for whom they are intended. Past experience seems to support this assumption.

To be confident that the assessment results will be received and attended to, a plan involving personal contact should be considered. Personal contact ensures that the reports are received by the intended reader and provides the most direct opportunity to assist the reader with interpreting the results in his particular situation and to answer technical questions. Again, a procedure similar to the one outlined by Impara (1975) appears appropriate for establishing this type of interaction with parents, teachers, and school administrators. Provision should be made for periodic meetings; one-time-meetings are not enough. At the first meeting, reports of the assessment results and assessment procedure, both written according to the reporting blueprint and at a level appropriate for the audiences, could be distributed and briefly reviewed. On the second, third, etc., occasions, more detailed study of the results and interpretations, together with plausible courses of action could be reviewed and discussed

for each particular situation. To facilitate the implementation of these periodic meetings, area meetings in which the intermediate assessment coordinator works with a few district personnel could be held. These trained and informed district personnel could then work with their own school principals, teachers and parents. Such regional-local meetings designed to enlarge the communicatio· network, have been used successfully in other similar situations (e.g., distribution of census data by U.S. Census Bureau, agriculture extension programs in emerging African countries).

Additional forms of communication which merit attention when planning an assessment delivery system include:

1. Follow-up research studies and curriculum evaluations, funded either by the state department of education or jointly by the state and local district, and conducted by local and state personnel and perhaps university based researchers;
2. Multi-media presentations at state meetings of teachers, administrators and parents, e.g., state meeting of the parent-teacher organization, state teacher's association meetings, local district professional days;
3. Participation in radio and television talk shows and public affairs programs;
4. Self assessment tests similar to the rather successful nationwide driving test conducted on television a few years ago. Alternatively, these tests could be published in the local newspaper in a format similar to "Word Power" found in Reader's Digest or the quiz and puzzle section in airline magazines (i.e., questions on one page, answers on another, together with state and local performance levels).

These methods, requiring active participation by parents and educational officials, promote attention to and interest in assessment results.

Heightened Activity Period Two. The second heightened dissemination period corresponds to the time during which assessment reports are prepared, interpretations are made, and subsequent activities derived from the results are initiated. These activities should be undertaken following the already prepared, advertised plans formulated during the first period.

One criticism frequently leveled against assessment programs is the seemingly inordinate amount of time between data collection and data reporting. School administrators, teachers, and parents want and appreciate quick turn-around. By following an already prepared reporting blueprint and utilizing a previously designed delivery system, it should be possible to more quickly report to these audiences.

Interim Reporting. It is important and wise to keep parents, teachers and school administrators continuously aware of the assessment between the two periods of increased dissemination activity. Interim reports will result in less chance of these audiences forgetting about the assessment; the necessary thread between the beginning and end of the assessment will be maintained. Written in a newsy style, these reports should describe the progress of the assessment and identify the next steps. They should be published on a regular periodic basis, for example, bimonthly. An audience corner should be provided. Here, local assessment plans and ways of using assessment data developed in local situations can be shared with other readers.

Qualified information coordinator. The procedures suggested in this paper require an assessment information coordinator. Bettinghaus and Miller (1973) and Womer (1973) earlier pointed out the necessity of having a well-trained staff for dissemination and utilization. Otherwise, it is too easy for the communication subsystem and consequently the assessment to become merely an overlaid function.

In addition to state level personnel, use should be made of a communication network. Local individuals, known and respected by parents and local school officials can serve in an intermediate liaison-coordination position. Through periodic briefings and training sessions, these intermediate coordinators can be trained to both collect and disseminate information in the local situation.

CONCLUSION

The ultimate test for success of a statewide assessment program is the extent to which the assessment data and information are used by the intended assessment audiences. The major premise adopted in this paper is that involvement of parents, teachers, and school administrators in the assessment process is the key to acceptance and subsequent use of the assessment by these audiences. Three procedures were briefly outlined for encouraging involvement by these audiences in the assessment: greater local participation in determining common assessment content; include reporting variables over which these people have more or less direct control (e.g., methods and materials, district reporting); and, adopt an hourglass approach to dissemination. We offer these suggestions for your consideration with the knowledge that in some states comparable procedures

are being followed with some success, and with the belief that in other states, they could be achieved within the general framework of the current programs.

REFERENCE LIST

Bettinghaus, Erwin P. and Miller, Gerald R., A Dissemination System for State Accountability Programs, Denver. Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project, 1973.

Hall, Mary, Dissemination and utilization of large-scale tests results: is anybody out there listening? and if not, why not? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, April 19-23, 1976.

Impara, James C., Determining Assessment Content - Meeting Real Needs. Paper presented at the Annual General Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., March 30 - April 3, 1975.

Shepard, Lorrie, Reporting the Results of Statewide Assessment. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, D.C., March 30 - April 3, 1975.

Womer, Frank B., Developing a Large Scale Assessment Program, Denver, Colorado: Cooperative Accountability Project., 1973.